DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 342 924 CE 060 461

TITLE The Meaning of Apprenticeship: When and How To Use the Term. A Policy Recommendation.

INSTITUTION Employment and Training Administration (DOL), Washington, DC. Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training.

PUB DATE 28 Jan 92

NOTE 5p.

PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Apprenticeships; *Definitions; *Federal Legislation; Job Training; *Labor Legislation; Postsecondary Education; *Public Policy; Skilled Occupations

ABSTRACT

This policy paper defines apprenticeship in terms of eight essential components, explains what apprenticeship is not, and recommends how the term should be used. As defined by the eight components, apprenticeship is: (1) a training strategy that combines supervised, structured, on-the-job training with related instruction and that is sponsored by employers or labor/management groups; (2) a training strategy that prepares people for skilled employment with content defined by the industry--completion may take up to 5 years; (3) a strategy with requirements that are legally defined; (4) a training strategy that leads to a legal certification of completion and journeyworker status; (5) a training strategy that requires a sizable commitment on the part of the employer or labor/management group; (6) a strategy that pays wages to participants; (7) a strategy that involves learning by working with masters of the craft; and (8) a strategy that involves a written agreement and social obligation between the program sponsor and the apprentice. According to the paper, apprenticeship is not cooperative education, vocational education, "tech prep," two plus two, summer or part-time work experiences, or other training programs. The paper recommends that the term "apprenticeship" should be reserved only for those programs that adhere to the eight essential components. (KC)

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WHEN AND HOW TO USE THE TERM

A POLICY RECOMMENDATION

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January 28, 1992

Prepared by

The Federal Committee on Apprenticeship
U.S. Department of Labor
Employment and Training Administration
Office of Work-Based Learning
Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training

CE 060 461

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THE MEANING OF APPRENTICESHIP: WHEN AND HOW TO USE THE TERM

A Policy Recommendation Prepared by
The Federal Committee on Apprenticeship
January 28, 1992

Increasing national attention is being paid to workforce preparation in the United States. This stems from the growing realization that America's ability to occupy a leading competitive position in the emerging global economy hinges, to a large degree, on assuring that the nation's workforce is second to none. Today, unfortunately, this is not the case. Employers frequently report that significant numbers of young people and adults alike exhibit serious educational deficiencies and are ill-equipped to perform effectively in the workplace. As a consequence, leaders from industry, labor, education, and government are all grappling with how to design educational reforms and education/training strategies that will improve the skills of America's current and future workforce.

In the spirit of this reform, one particular training strategy -- apprenticeship -- has captured the interest of many policy makers, educators and others who are involved in the national reform movement. Its growing appeal comes as no surprise and, perhaps, is long overdue. Experience both in the U.S. and abroad has repeatedly demonstrated that apprenticeship is a highly effective strategy for preparing people for work. The bulk of apprenticeship programs offered in the U.S. and its territories are in the building trades and manufacturing industries, but there is significant potential to develop apprenticeship programs in a variety of other industries.

The rush to embrace apprenticeship, however, is leading to efforts that could undermine the very pillars of its value. For example, in some instances, apprenticeship is being viewed as a generic concept -- one that can be loosely applied to a variety of learning situations. Likewise, others have coined such terms as "youth apprenticeship" to characterize various school-to-work transition programs. Such thinking, while understandable in an environment that begs for creativity and innovation, may be more harmful than helpful to the cause.

What Apprenticeship Is: The Essential Components

1. Apprenticeship is a training strategy that a) combines supervised, structured on-the-job training with related theoretical instruction and b) is sponsored by employers or labor/management groups that have the ability to hire and train in a work environment.

2. Apprenticeship is a training strategy that prepares people for skilled employment by conducting training in bona fide and documented employment settings. The content of training, both on-the-job and related instruction, is defined and dictated by the needs of the industry.[1] The length of training is determined by the needs of the specific occupation within an industry. In the building trades, for example, some apprenticeship programs are as long as five years with up to 240 hours of related instruction per year.

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[1] As used herein, "industry" refers to all types of businesses/workplace settings.

3. Apprenticeship is a training strategy with requirements that are clearly delineated in Federal and State laws and regulations. The National Apprenticeship Act of 1937 (also known as the Fitzgerald Act) and numerous State laws provide the basis for the operation of formal apprenticeship training programs in the U.S.; regulations that implement these laws are in force today. These laws and regulations establish minimum requirements for protecting the welfare of the apprentice such as the length of training, the type and amount of related instruction, supervision of the apprentice, appropriate ratios of apprentices to journeypersons, apprentice selection and recruitment procedures, wage progression, safety, etc.

4. Apprenticeship is a training strategy that by virtue of a legal contract (indenture) leads to a Certificate of Completion and official journeyperson status. These credentials have explicit meaning, recognition and respect in the eyes of Federal and State governments and relevant industries.

5. Apprenticeship is a training strategy that involves a tangible and generally sizable investment on the part of the employer or labor/management program sponsor.

6. Apprenticeship is a training strategy that pays wages to its participants at least during the on-the-job training phase of their apprenticeship and that increases these wages throughout the training program in accordance with a predefined wage progression scale.

7. Apprenticeship is a training strategy in which participants learn by working directly under the supervision and tutelage of masters in the craft, trade, or relevant occupational area.

8. Apprenticeship is a training strategy that involves a written agreement and an implicit social obligation between the program sponsor and the apprentice. The written agreement, which is signed by both the apprentice and the program sponsor and is ratified by government, details the roles and responsibilities of each party. The implicit social obligation gives employers or program sponsors the right to expect to employ the apprentice upon completion of training given the investment in training and gives the apprentice a reasonable right to expect such employment. Labor market conditions should guide the size of training programs to enable each party to maintain his or her side of the obligation.

What Apprenticeship Is Not

Unless they conform to the essential components described previously, apprenticeship is not cooperative education, vocational education, tech prep, two plus two (three or four), summer or part-time work experiences or any of the other myriad training strategies that many are promoting as ways to assure adequate workforce preparation. Such strategies undoubtedly have value in their own right, but they are not apprenticeship. What distinguishes apprenticeship from most of these other approaches are such fundamental qualities as training program sponsorship and location, the skills acquired, the value attached to the credential earned, curricula content that is defined exclusively by the workplace, wage requirements, the written agreement, and the implicit social contract that exists between program sponsors and their participants. No other training strategy provides for this unique combination of characteristics. When a person completes a registered apprenticeship program, he or she is prepared to go to work as a fully trained, competent journeyperson whose skills enable him or her to perform effectively in the workplace. Few, if any, other types of educational programs can make this claim.

A Policy Recommendation

As the education and training system in this country undergoes its restructuring, how apprenticeship fits in must be considered. Some may argue that the definition of apprenticeship should be broadened to encompass some or all of the previously described alternative training strategies. Unfortunately, this could have the practical effect of seriously undermining a tried and true training strategy -- one that, ironically, exhibits all of the qualities that reformers are striving to achieve in new training designs. Of particular concern is the possibility that an expanded definition could significantly dilute the value and meaning attached to the apprenticeship credential. Today, an apprentice who earns a Certificate of Completion and attains journeyworker status from a registered apprenticeship program knows that he or she has acquired industry-defined skills at industry-accepted standards of performance and can reasonably expect to be gainfully employed in his or her occupational area. If alternative training strategies (ones that do not fully conform to the essential components) are also permitted to call themselves "apprenticeship," the apprenticeship credential stands to become devalued. Such a step makes little sense at a time when other credentials -- such as high school diplomas -- have lost much of their meaning.

Thus, we conclude that the term "apprenticeship" should be reserved only for those programs that adhere to the eight essential components described previously. Other strategies may seek to adopt designs that conform to all the essential components, in which case they may be called apprenticeship. But to call any other types of programs "apprenticeship" is to do a major disservice to the participants in such programs. Whether intentional or not, the participants may be misled into thinking that completion of these programs will allow them to reap the benefits accorded to graduates of true apprenticeship programs.

Clearly, we are on the verge of a major revolution with respect to how America prepares its workforce. As a new national training system emerges in the coming years, considerable thought should be given to the role of true apprenticeship in that new system. On one hand, apprenticeship could be the locomotive that drives this training system. Under this scenario, apprenticeship programs would serve as the principal form of training for preparing the majority of the nation's workforce. Alternatively, apprenticeship may become one of several cars on a train that provides a variety of training options to existing and future workers. This choice requires further study and broader deliberation, but, whatever the outcome, the integrity of the term " apprenticeship" should not be jeopardized or compromised.

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The Federal Committee on Apprenticeship (FCA) is established by charter to advise the U.S. Secretary of Labor on matters pertaining to the U.S. apprenticeship system. The FCA consists of representatives of employers, labor, educators, and others.